2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE GHOTUL AND MARRIAGE

It is a cart, if you know how to drive, boy.
It is a food, if you know how to eat, boy.
It is a path, if you know how to walk, boy.
It is a horse, if you know how to ride, boy.

—*Marriage song (Lagir Pata) of Malakot*

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581

AMONGST ourselves marriage is so closely associated with an initiation into a sexual union and experience that was previously tabooed, that it is not easy at first to adjust ourselves to the outlook of a society that can so clearly distinguish between sexual love without marriage and domestic love within it.

For a Muria the sexual side of marriage is comparatively unimportant; he marries because he wants to have children whom he can call his own, so that he can have a home of his own, and so that he can have a partner whom he can regard as his own, over whom he has authority and a right, with whom relationship will be permanent and recognized.

This is not mere individualism; it is part of the process of growing up. It is the discovery that sexual excitement is not enough; it is often, as we shall see, the still deeper discovery that romantic attachment is not always the best foundation for a lifelong union. There is a beautiful saying in the *Rigveda* (III, 53, 4)—'Wife is the home; she alone is the place of rest'—which is well paralleled by something said by a young Muria wife at Phunder about life with her husband: 'It was like sitting down on a stool after a long and troubled journey.'

The life of pre-nuptial freedom ends in a longing for security and permanence. This desire is naturally more emphatic in the ghotul where partners are often changed. In Kongera a Muria said, 'You only get real pleasure from your own property; in the ghotul it is always someone else's'. And Gando of Jaitpuri said, 'I often remember my life in the ghotul, but you can't get that happiness always. That is only for four days, but life in your very own home lasts'. Man and wife become each other's property; they get a *haq* or 'right' over each other; and because everybody respects this right, regarding adultery as evil and dangerous, Muria marriage is secure and is not marred by fear, the source of jealousy.

Every Muria contrasts the free happy life in the ghotul with the economic drudgery of marriage. 'The ghotul is for happiness,' they said at Nayanar. 'The home is for work.' The Jamadar of Sorma said, 'Don't ask me about my youth, for in those days I never lacked tobacco and lime. But now I have lost my happiness in thinking always of my belly'. Many songs underline the contrast.

581
539

O the kingdom of the unmarried!
You will never see that kingdom more.
Of housework you know nothing.
You went wandering in the fields,
Looking like a sarus crane.
Early morning you would go;
Evening you'd come home again.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE GHOTUL AND MARRIAGE

581
539

O that beautiful ghotul!
Every day you went to clean it.
The road was like a jackal's tail.
You used to go along that road.
In your left hand was a winnowing-fan,
In your right hand a broom,
At sunset you would go there.
You will never see that Raj again.
Now you are going to your husband's house.
Now your pleasure will be work in the house.
You have got no sense at all.
Your husband will curse you,
Your mother-in-law will curse you.
Holding your forehead you will weep.
You will remember the days of youth.
Then you will know what hardship is.
You have got no sense at all.

883
593
[591]

The first days of marriage certainly appear to emphasize this taunt. The new life together is not immediately satisfactory, especially for the girl. She has to stay in a house filled with her husband's relatives, and work for them. She has not yet a house, perhaps not even a room, of her own. It is not easy for her to adjust herself to the complete and drastic change in her life. 'A young wife,' they said at Masora, 'is like a bulbul whose tail goes up and down all the time. So does she shake her buttocks. She cooks if she feels like it, gets water if she feels inclined. It is hard for her to forget she is no more a motiari; her feet itch to dance.' But she must never enter the ghotul again, the ghotul which for the last six or eight years has been the centre of her social and emotional life. She must avoid her old ghotul partners; she must forget her ghotul name; she must give away most of her ornaments; she has lost her freedom. Lingo Pen will no longer protect her from pregnancy, which indeed quickly follows. There are no more rapturous evenings round the ghotul fire, no more expeditions through the green forest to other villages, no more dancing to the light of torches at the great festivals. She is now a wife and must prepare to be a mother.

For the husband the change is less drastic. He may continue to spend his evenings in the ghotul, returning home late at night to sleep. This is perhaps the hardest trial that the young wife has to bear; she must abandon old romance, he may continue it. He even holds his ghotul title for six months or a year longer. He may go on expeditions, organise marriages, dance at festivals. But his sex life is undoubtedly curtailed. 'Now he is responsible,' I was told at Malakot. 'He is a man with wife and home. Fun and teasing is ended, touching others is ended; he has a wife. For his old habits the penalty is swelling and death. He may now only do it at marriages and at the sport of the gods at festivals.' Even his visits to the ghotul must soon end. Sooner or later he must lay down his office; sooner or later comes the day when the boys suggest that his presence is no longer so welcome as it was. He must then stop his visits or he will be fined and his poultry stolen.

But by this time married life has become established and serene. Happiness has begun to illuminate the hard tasks of home and field. That is why the Muria regard marriage of such supreme importance; everyone must pass through its gate to the fulfilment of tribal and social life. The ghotul with its many joys might easily have become an end in itself. But the Muria

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

O mother, the clouds look like smoke,
Each roof seems joined to the one next door.
I must go and see it, mother.
Whom will you go with, daughter?
I will go with my uncle's son, mother.
Don't go with him, daughter;
He will pour haldi over you.
Let him pour haldi if he wills, mother.
I can't rest till I go with him.

In those cases where no *gudamol* union is possible or convenient, the parents consider many things before they go to 'pluck the flower' of a betrothal. It may safely be said that the thought uppermost in their minds is the happiness of their child. A father seeking a daughter-in-law considers whether the women of such and such a family are hard workers, free from the taint of witchcraft, unstained by scandal. He does not seem to worry whether a girl is beautiful or no, though he would naturally prefer her to be 'well made and conformable'. When a betrothal party arrives at a house, a girl's parents discuss much the same things. Will the boy be a good worker? Has there been scandal in the family, signs of indifference to the laws of the clan? Is the boy himself steady, will he go through with the matter? The girl is consulted; if she strongly objects, the father sends the visitors away. Once she has agreed, however, he expects her to abide by her choice. In the song on p. 89 there is a hint that several betrothal parties may visit a house before the parents can make up their minds—a delay not always pleasing to the daughter.

We have, therefore, in Muria society two very different traditions existing side by side. Before marriage, in the ghotul, boys and girls are encouraged to live to the full a life of romantic passion. For marriage, everything must be arranged on the lines of strictest commonsense. A boy can live with the girl he is in love with before marriage, but not in marriage. How does this arrangement work?

I am not here attempting to pass a personal judgement in this matter, I am not considering whether it is a good or a bad arrangement. The interesting thing is what the chelik and motiari think of it.

Generally, the boys and girls believe that what their parents, or rather society and the tribe, arrange makes for ultimate happiness. They may object to a particular choice made by their parents, but they do not object to their making a choice at all. It is easier for them to accept this position because what they think matters about marriage is not so much the partner as the whole condition of life so different from life in the ghotul. 'The ghotul is for happiness', they said at Nayanar. 'Marriage is for work.' They are more concerned about the new home than the new partner. The new way of life is more important than the person who will share it.

It is some such reflection as this that enables boys and girls to bear the very great pain of separation from their lovers at marriage. This is a very real thing, especially in the *jodidār* ghotul. Here a chelik and motiari may have lived six or seven years together, perhaps in great fidelity, and have come to love each other devotedly. Everything in life—except responsibility for children and a home—has been shared. They have gone together to festivals and danced all night in each other's arms. They have been to a score of marriages and shared a world of jokes together. They have slept night after night in the ghotul 'lovely as a bison's horns'. Then suddenly

THE GHOTUL AND MARRIAGE

they are torn apart; they must never talk to each other again; each must change over to live, under conditions infinitely less romantic, with someone of whom they may know nothing.

Yet in the great majority of cases they do it, and believe it to be for the best. And statistics support them. A percentage of only 2·6 of marital failures among arranged marriages is very low.

But naturally there are disorders of this neat and tidy arrangement. Sooner than be married to another girl, some boys—from both types of ghotul—elope with their motiari. In Kabonga, the chelik said, 'If a boy does not run away with his motiari, he doesn't really love her'. A girl may slip away to the house of her lover and establish herself there for a *paisa mundi* wedding. 'A girl in love for the first time will walk even on a monkey's path', narrow, slippery and steep. She cares little for the opinion of her fellows. Such incidents are not very common—there were 116 irregular marriages among our 2000, of which 90 were elopements—but they occur. When the parents' hands are forced in this manner, they generally accept the situation. Compensation has to be paid to the girl's betrothed or, if she was not engaged, to her parents, and all is well.

In a case of pregnancy, if the girl does not run away, she is married to her betrothed—if he will have her, or to the boy responsible—whether he wants her or not, and a fine must be paid. Sometimes the pregnant girl runs away with her chelik and they get married in another village. There is always, however, an attempt to bring the lovers back. If there is no pregnancy and they are caught in time, they are fined and nothing more is said. If the girl is pregnant, and she is brought back, she must be offered to her betrothed, and it is a remarkable result of ghotul solidarity how often the boy accepts her and the responsibility for another's child.

The following incident is instructive:

> There were three brothers in the Garhbangal ghotul. The eldest made a girl pregnant; he was fined five rupees and she was married to her betrothed. Then the same boy made the same girl's younger sister pregnant. He consulted with his second brother and they persuaded their youngest brother to carry off the girl to another village and thus accept the responsibility for the pregnancy. The eldest brother did not want to be held capable of 'ruining' two girls, and he was moreover engaged to marry the landlord's daughter, whom he did not want to lose. But the youngest boy and the motiari were caught and brought back. The boy confessed the truth, and the eldest brother was fined seven rupees and the two others five rupees each. The girl was married to her betrothed. All three brothers are now happily married.

Sometimes parents who are very sympathetic decide that they will bear the fine and the bother, and allow a son to marry a girl he has made pregnant, if they are sure he really loves her, and there are no serious difficulties in the way. But generally, parents do not like to do this. At Binjhli, a girl was pregnant by a chelik to whom she was greatly devoted, but her father said, 'Why did you not tell me about this when I drank liquor for you on the betrothal day? I took gifts for you publicly, and now you would make me look down on the ground in shame'. At Nayanar too a father spoke in much the same way to a boy from Kulanar who made his daughter pregnant. 'How can I give her to you? You are a thief, though I know you love her and she loves you. But I have taken gifts and I have drunk liquor for another clan, and how can I change now?'

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

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This may sound hard, but unless parents insisted I doubt if the ghotul could continue. The orderly life of the tribe would be destroyed. After a betrothal a girl belongs already to her future husband's clan; she may attend his clan festivals and should avoid his, and not her own, totem. An engagement is not a mere contract between individuals; it is an alliance of families and clans, affecting even the Departed.

Serious difficulties are not common. Occasionally a man may have an experience like that of Kunjami Gudra of Chaniyagaon.

> While I was a little boy I was betrothed to a girl in Korpar village. Two years afterwards I went with the other chelik of Chaniyagaon to Jungani for the Pus Kolang dance. There I met the Nirosa of that ghotul, and fell in love with her. When she came with the other girls to dance the Diwali dances in our village, I was able to make love to her.
>
> Then I was married, but I did not care for my wife. Soon after the marriage I went to work at Jungani and stayed in the ghotul for some days. Now my love for the Nirosa grew much stronger. She told me she was betrothed to a boy in Gorma, but I persuaded her, and shortly after I returned home, she came to my house. I said, 'Why have you come?' She replied, 'For *paisa-mundi*, for money and a ring'.
>
> My first wife left me, but did her best to plague me with magic. One day she sent a black cobra to attack me. Another day as I was returning from the Dhanora bazaar—where my first wife lived—a tiger (sent by her) chased me up a tree. But with my second wife, I am living very happily.

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762

Out of the 20 suicides committed by Muria of the north during the past ten years only two were the result of parental interference in their children's love affairs. I have described one of these cases on page 416 and I will give the other here, for it is relevant to our discussion.

In 1933 Budha of Bayalpur arranged a marriage between his son Malsai and Ghasnin, the daughter of Liti of Korhabera. They were both then young children. Each grew up in their separate ghotul, and Ghasnin began to accompany the older girls on the Diwali dances. The motiari of Korhabera go to Honawandi and the chelik of Honawandi go for the Dandar dances to Korhabera. Gradually Ghasnin herself became a leader of the motiari. In 1940 she became very friendly with Dawari of Honawandi, and they decided to marry. One evening Ghasnin begged her mother to allow this, but she refused. The next day, Ghasnin ran away to Honawandi and was married to Dawari that very night, the chelik and motiari of the ghotul there assisting at the wedding. Next morning, her elder brother arrived and angrily forced her to come home. On the way she escaped and ran through the jungle back to her husband. But her brother came again and forcibly took her home. Her parents decided to hand her over to the parents of Malsai, her betrothed. But because she was married and in love, and because Malsai was an undersized diseased boy, she was in despair. On the morning of 18 January 1941 she escaped from the house and drowned herself in the village tank.

In both these incidents, the sense of obligation to the official 'legal' partner is worthy of remark. Gudra had to quiet his conscience by persuading himself that his first wife was a witch; Ghasnin allowed herself to be taken from her husband's house, and seems to have accepted as inevitable her re-marriage to Malsai.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

CHAPTER NINE

CRIME IN THE RELATIONSHIPS OF FAMILY LIFE

I

Not only to the aboriginals, but to all the inhabitants of India family relationships mean far more than to the dispersed and individualistic peoples of the West. People live together and share things; they control one another and interfere with each other; they are connected by rules of jest or taboo; proximity sometimes leads on to disaster. The following Table illustrates the number of murders resulting from such relationships.

674

TABLE SEVENTEEN

Illustrating the relationships of 107 victims in 100 cases

Wives killed by husbands	18
Husbands killed by wives	3
Fathers-in-law killed by sons-in-law	5
Mothers-in-law killed by sons-in-law	3
Young children killed by parents	6
Brothers killed by brothers	9
Fathers killed by sons	3
Mother killed by son	1
Sisters-in-law killed by brothers-in-law	3
Son killed by father	1
Other murders where the parties were related ...	10

581 To a Maria youth and his wife marriage is a real partnership in living and not merely an association for the production of children. Husband and wife share far more of life together than is common in the ordinary Indian village. They work together in the fields. They go to the jungle for wood. They eat in company. They sit together to drink rice-beer. Women even attend funerals with the men and help them to erect memorial pillars. Their life together is happy and united, and woe to the man who disturbs it.

[p. 104]